

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 SAM-01 SAB-01 IO-10 OMB-01 COME-00 EB-07

LAB-04 SIL-01 TRSE-00 ACDA-05 /099 W

----- 051500

R 131100Z AUG 75

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5769

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

USINT BAGHDAD UNN

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 10291

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, LE, SY

SUBJECT: ASSESSMENT OF PRIME MINISTER KARAME'S VISIT TO DAMASCUS
AUGUST 2

1. SUMMARY: PRIMIN KARAME'S VISIT TO DAMASCUS HAS BEEN
VIEWED HERE AS AN IMPORTANT AND SUCCESSFUL DIPLOMATIC MOVE. HOW-
EVER, ITS IMPORTANCE LIES MORE IN THE ATMOSPHERICS, I.E., ITS
DEMONSTRATION OF LEBANESE/SYRIAN GOODWILL, THAN IN THE CON-
CRETE RESULTS APPARENTLY ACHIEVED. END SUMMARY.

2. PRIMIN RASHID KARAME'S ONE-DAY VISIT TO DAMASCUS AUG 2,
HIS FIRST RIP OUTSIDE LEBANON SINCE ASSUMING THE PREMIERSHIP
A MONTH EARLIER, WAS PROMINENTLY FEATURED AFTERWARDS IN THE
BEIRUT PRESS AND IS VIEWED HERE AS A "BIG SUCCESS." MANY
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LEBANESE, RECALLING THAT SYRIAN FONMIN KHADDAM WAS IN-

STRUMENTAL IN SOLVING THE LATEST ROUND OF CIVIL STRIFE IN LEBANON, SEE KARAME'S TRIP AS A SKILLFUL MOVE TO CEMENT THIS SYRIAN GOODWILL. THE HANGING OF THE FIVE "ARAB COMMUNIST ORG" MEMBERS IN DAMASCUS ON THE SAME DAY AS KARAME'S VISIT IS A COINCIDENCE WELCOMED HERE AS HIGHLIGHTING SYRIA'S INTEREST IN QUASHING SOCIALLY DESTRUCTIVE GROUPS.

3. GOL FOREIGN MINISTRY SOURCES, HOWEVER, INCLUDING THE DIRECTOR OF POLITICAL AFFAIRS WHO ACCOMPANIED KARAME, TEND TO DOWNPLAY THE TRIP'S SIGNIFICANCE. THEY POINT OUT THAT THE LEBANESE/SYRIAN RELATIONSHIP IS UNIQUE AND THAT LEBANESE PRIMINS TRADITIONALLY MAKE A "PROTOCOL" VISIT TO DAMASCUS UPON ASSUMING OFFICE. PERHAPS REFLECTING KARAME'S LEGENDARY CLOSED-MOUTH APPROACH TO POLITICS, MINISTRY SOURCES ARE NOT FORTHCOMING ON THE CONTENTS OF THE DAMASCUS TALKS. WE UNDERSTAND FROM A SEPARATE UNCONFIRMED SOURCE THAT MILITARY COOPERATION, PALESTINIAN AFFAIRS, THE "ARAB COMMUNIST ORG." AND THE ACTIVITIES OF THE PRO-IRAQI BAATHISTS IN LEBANON WERE AMONG THE SUBJECTS DISCUSSED, AS WELL AS STANDARD BILATERAL QUESTIONS.

4. THE MAJOR CONCRETE RESULT OF THE VISIT, AS FAR AS WE CAN DETERMINE, WAS THE ANNOUNCED REVIVAL OF THE JOINT SYRIAN/LEBANESE COMMISSION. DORMANT FOR SOME TIME, THIS BODY IS CHARGED WITH ARBITRATING ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL QUESTIONS AFFECTING CITIZENS OF THE TWO COUNTRIES. WE UNDERSTAND THAT ITS RENEWED MANDATE WILL COVER PARTICULARLY: (A) TRANSIT, (B) SYRIAN WORKERS IN LEBANON, AND (C) THE WATERS OF THE ASI RIVER.

5. IN THIS CONNECTION, KARAME SEIZED THE OCCASION OF HIS TRIP TO REVIVE A LEBANESE PROMISE TO SYRIA DATING FROM 1973 BUT NEVER IMPLEMENTED, IN WHICH THE GOL HAD AGREED TO IMPROVE THE LOT OF SYRIAN WORKERS IN LEBANON AS A CONDITION FOR SYRIA'S REOPENING THE BORDER CLOSED OSTENSIBLY IN SUPPORT OF PALESTINIANS FIGHTING THE LEBANESE ARMY. PICKING UP THIS UNFULFILLED COMMITMENT, KARAME INTRODUCED A DRAFT LAW IN PARLIAMENT AT THE END OF JULY GIVING SYRIAN WORKERS WHO HAVE STEADY EMPLOYMENT IN LEBANON (VERY FEW DO) THE STATUS OF "PERMANENT EMPLOYEE." THIS WOULD ENTITLE THEM

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TO SOCIAL SECURITY AND OTHER BENEFITS "ON THE BASIS OF RECIPROCITY." THE DRAFT LAW MUST NOW OBTAIN PARLIAMENTARY APPROVAL, AN UNCERTAIN PROSPECT AT BEST. BUT BEING WIDELY PUBLICIZED JUST AS KARAME CROSSED THE BORDER, THE PROJECT SERVED HIS PURPOSES WELL.

6. THE HIGH-LEVEL MILITARY REPRESENTATION ON KARAME'S DEL INDICATES THAT MILITARY AFFAIRS WERE PROBABLY AN IM-

PORTANT PART OF HIS DISCUSSIONS. MINISTRY OF DEFENSE SOURCES HAVE NOT GIVEN US ANY PARTICULARS OF THESE TALKS, BUT OUR OWN GUESS IS THAT NOT MUCH WAS AGREED IN THIS FIELD BEYOND THE COORDINATION ALREADY EXISTING BETWEEN THE LEBANESE AND SYRIAN COMMANDS. PRESS SPECULATION ON THE SUBJECT IS RAMPANT, MOSTLY SUGGESTING THAT KARAME ACCEPTED TO STUDY THE POSSIBILITY OF CLOSER MILITARY COORDINATION WITH A VIEW TO POSSIBLE FUTURE HOSTILITIES AGAINST ISRAEL.

7. COMMENT: THE POLITICAL IMPACT OF THIS TRIP APPEARS TO LIE LESS IN ITS CONCRETE RESULTS THAN IN ITS DEMONSTRATION OF LEBANESE/SYRIAN SOLIDARITY AT THIS JUNCTURE IN LEBANON'S HISTORY. KARAME, RELYING IN LARGE PART ON HIS OWN CONNECTIONS WITH SYRIAN LEADERS GOING BACK SEVERAL YEARS, WAS ABLE TO SHOW THAT THE SYRIA OF 1975 IS NOT THE SYRIA OF 1973, AND THAT HE AS GOL PRIMIN IS WELL SUITED TO MAINTAIN THE NEW GOOD RELATIONSHIP. THESE POINTS WERE NOT LOST ON OBSERVERS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE LEBANON.
GODLEY

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: FOREIGN RELATIONS, HEAD OF GOVERNMENT VISITS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 13 AUG 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: RowellE0
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975BEIRUT10291
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750279-0858
From: BEIRUT
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750854/aaaabvht.tel
Line Count: 134
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: RowellE0
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 22 MAY 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <22 MAY 2003 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <06 OCT 2003 by RowellE0>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ASSESSMENT OF PRIME MINISTER KARAME'S VISIT TO DAMASCUS AUGUST 2
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, LE, SY, (KARAME, RASHID)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006